

Considerations For Interpretation

UCR Limitations

N. C. UCR Program — Information currently collected by the North Carolina Program is generally the same as that gathered by the National system, and the methods of classifying and scoring (counting) offenses and arrests are the same. This readily enables comparisons with other states and the Nation (see “Crime in the United States” in Section VII), but the information gaps present in the National program are also inherent in the North Carolina's system.

Primary Purpose — The Uniform Crime Reporting Program has been subject to much criticism during its history, and while many of these commentaries have been valid, at least some of the shortcomings are understandable when it is remembered that the program has been developed to furnish management information for use primarily by law enforcement agencies.

The Uniform Crime Reports are not a court or corrections statistical program. They are not designed to furnish an overview of the workings of our entire criminal justice system, nor are they able to give the complete picture of law enforcement activity. The main goal of the UCR Program is to furnish police administrators with a measure of their activities and operational problems as indicated by the number of reported offenses, arrests, clearances, and the like.

Therefore, much of the criticism of the UCR Program itself is weakened when its stated purpose is kept in mind. Uniform Crime Reports data are the best crime information currently available since they reflect the key events (criminal offenses) that set in motion the various phases of our criminal justice process. The number of arrests, prosecutions, or convictions, while capable of more precise measurement, nevertheless is less indicative of the amount and nature of crime because such data is further removed from the original event. But, because the Uniform Crime Reporting Program is the only recurring crime and arrest reporting program operating on a national level, of necessity it serves as the base for assessing the many significant information gaps at the input end of the criminal justice system.

Type Data Collected — A first step in the control of crime is to ascertain the true dimensions of the problem. However, present statistics as gathered by the UCR Program measure neither the real incidence of crime nor the full amount of economic loss of victims. Information regarding the number of property stolen and covered data is requested only for property stolen in Part 1 offense categories. There is no calculation made for property

damaged except in the arson offense classification.

For the Part 2 offenses (except simple assault), the only information submitted is the number of arrests for these crimes according to the age, sex, race, and ethnicity of the subject. Consequently, there is no record of the actual number of these offenses occurring.

Moreover, the broad categorization of this data does not allow an examination of the number of offenses reported nor the arrests made for such offenses as spouse abuse, the writing of worthless checks, and kidnapping. The number of these particular offenses or arrests, as well as others, are included in such general categories as Assault, Fraud, and All Other Offenses.

Although some victimization data is collected in the offense categories of Homicide and Rape, there is no record of the victims of Robbery, Assault, Burglary, and the remainder of the UCR Part 1 and 2 Offenses.

Degrees of Seriousness — The Crime Index does not explicitly take into account the varying degrees of seriousness of its components. Each crime receives the same weight as it is added to the Index. Consequently, an auto theft is counted the same as a murder, and an aggravated assault is weighted equally with an attempted burglary. Any review of crime must consider the volume, rate, and trend of each offense that comprises the Index and the relationship between these crimes.

UCR Classification and Scoring Procedures — The North Carolina and National Uniform Crime Reporting Programs are designed to measure offenses committed and persons arrested, and difficulty can arise if this distinction is not kept firmly in mind. Crimes relate to events, but arrests relate to persons. The classifying and scoring of one robbery, for instance, could involve several offenders, several victims, and even the commission of other offenses which would go unreported for UCR purposes (see “Scoring of Offenses” in this Section).

Even more of the total crime picture is lost when arrests are scored. UCR counts only the number of people arrested and not the number of charges per person. Clearly, one arrest could involve any number of different or similar charges against one offender.

Value of Property Stolen and Recovered — What effect the rate of inflation may be having on the report of these data along with other factors affecting these sums is impossible to calculate. The UCR methods of valuing stolen property involve the acceptance of the victim's

evaluation in most instances, and exaggeration of these figures is quite possible.

Juvenile Crime Data — The accuracy of juvenile offenses and arrest statistics varies from department to department since the procedures for handling juveniles are not nearly as uniform as those for adults. Many juvenile offenders are handled informally and, as a consequence, inaccurate or incomplete recording of the event or action may result. Furthermore, the degree of juvenile involvement in solved offenses is probably seriously misunderstood because juvenile participation in clearances is recorded only when juveniles are exclusively involved. When both adults and juveniles are subjects in a clearance, the juvenile participation is not reported.

Reporting Variation — North Carolina now receives Uniform Crime Reports from over 400 law enforcement agencies monthly. Because the number of reporting agencies is so large, one must be aware that unintentional variations from UCR guidelines may occur and pass undetected affecting the validity of the data presented here. Municipal ordinances, local criminal justice administrative policies, efficiency and thoroughness of record keeping, and Uniform Crime Reporting proficiency and practices all affect the amount of crime and arrests reported. Furthermore, socio-economic conditions and the characteristics and attitudes of the local population influence the magnitude and nature of criminal behavior in a community.

Conclusion — The preceding comments should not be viewed as an indictment of the UCR Program which, admittedly, was designed to meet only the minimal operational requirements of a law enforcement agency. It is doubtful that those people tasked with creating this program some sixty years ago could ever have envisioned the informational demands now being placed on today's law enforcement. While current methods of gathering and reporting crime and arrest data provide a less than complete picture of criminality in our society, there is at present no other information system in general use that will more adequately perform this task.

The Index of Crime

The crime index offense table can be used to indicate the probable extent, fluctuation, and distribution of crime for the State of North Carolina as a whole, by geographic divisions, by individual counties and cities, and by standard metropolitan statistical areas. The measure used is a Crime Index and consists of seven important offenses which are counted as they become known to the law

enforcement agencies. Crime classifications used in the Index are: murder and non-negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary-breaking and entering, larceny and motor vehicle theft.

The total number of criminal acts that occur is unknown, but those that are reported to law enforcement provide the first means of a count. Not all crimes come readily to the attention of law enforcement; not all crimes are of sufficient importance to be significant in an index; and not all important crimes occur with enough regularity to be meaningful in an index.

Classification of Offenses

UCR divides offenses into two major classifications which are designated Part 1 and Part 2 offenses. This distinction is important to keep in mind because different information is collected for each. Part 1 offenses include the violent crimes of murder and non-negligent manslaughter, negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault and the property crimes of burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft and arson. All other offenses are classified as Part 2 offenses (see "Offense Definitions" in this section). The Part 1 offenses, excluding negligent manslaughter and arson, are used to calculate the Crime Index and Crime Rate.

All offenses are classified on the basis of law enforcement investigations in accordance with UCR offense definitions (which will not necessarily coincide with N.C. statute definitions). Because UCR identifies a law enforcement problem, offense classifications are not based on the findings of a court, coroner, jury or decision of a prosecutor.

Scoring of Offenses

Only the number of those offenses for Part 1 crimes and simple assault are scored (counted) for UCR. The method of scoring varies with the type of crime committed and it is important to remember that the number of offenders does not determine the number of offenses.

For murder and non-negligent manslaughter, negligent manslaughter, rape, and aggravated and simple assault, one offense is scored for each victim, regardless of the number of offenders involved. For example, three offenders could be involved in the murder of one victim, and in this case one murder would be scored.

For robbery and larceny, one offense is counted for each distinct operation which is separate in time and place. The number of victims in any one operation does

not determine the number of offenses. For example, if 10 people are robbed in a bar at the same time, only one offense is counted. However, if that robber then leaves the bar and holds up a passerby, a second offense has occurred and would be scored.

For burglary, one offense is counted for each "structure" which is illegally entered. For UCR purposes, a "structure" is generally defined as an enclosed, permanently occupied area. The illegal entries for the purpose of committing a felony or theft of such structures as dwelling houses, garages, offices, barns, and the like are considered burglaries, and one burglary is scored for each separate unit entered. The illegal entry of those structures used to house transients such as hotel rooms is scored as one burglary regardless of the number of these rooms that have been entered.

For motor vehicle theft, one offense is counted for each vehicle stolen. For UCR purposes, a motor vehicle is defined as any self-propelled vehicle that runs on the surface and not on rails or a body of water. Thefts of farm and construction equipment are excluded from this definition and are scored as larcenies. For arson, one offense is counted for each occurrence even if a more serious offense such as murder occurred as a result of the act. Additionally any attempts to commit any of the above offenses are also counted with the exception of attempts or assaults to kill which are classified and scored under aggravated assaults.

For multiple offenses that occur in one crime incident (at the same "time and place"), only the most serious offense is counted with the exceptions of arson (always counted) and a combination of larceny and motor vehicle theft (only the motor vehicle theft will be counted). Part 1 crimes are ranked according to seriousness and appear in order from most serious to least serious (See order of crimes in Offense Definitions in this section). For example, a robbery and an aggravated assault have occurred, but because robbery is considered by UCR to be more serious, only the robbery is scored. From one perspective, this method of counting seriously understates the crime problem, but from another, it prevents undue inflation of crime statistics. A Part 2 offense that occurs in combination with Part 1 offenses or by itself is not counted.

Clearances

An offense is considered cleared (solved) when at least one offender is arrested for a crime, even though several may have been involved. Offenses may also be cleared by exceptional means when some element beyond law enforcement control precludes the placing of formal

charges against the offender. Examples of circumstances allowing exceptional clearances are the death of the offender (suicide, justifiably killed by police or private citizen, etc.); the victim's refusal to cooperate with prosecution after the offender has been identified; or the denial of extradition because the offender committed another crime in a different jurisdiction and is being prosecuted there. In all exceptional clearance cases, law enforcement must have identified the offender, have enough evidence to support arrest, and know the offender's location. Keep in mind that not all crimes are cleared within the calendar year in which the offense occurs.

Clearances are counted as either "adult" or "juvenile." A "juvenile" clearance is counted only when juveniles are involved exclusively in the commission and clearance of an offense. If the arrest of both adults and juveniles results in a clearance, it is counted as an "adult" clearance.

Property Stolen and Recovered

The figures for value of property stolen and recovered report the value at each point in time. Although property can increase in value over time, it is more likely that stolen property will be recovered in a damaged condition. Therefore recovery value does not necessarily represent a "clearance rate" for stolen property, and one cannot use it to determine law enforcement effectiveness in recovering stolen goods. Because stolen and recovered property figures indicate thefts and recoveries in the current year, it is important to note that recovered property may have been stolen in a previous year. In addition, the type and value of stolen recovered property is reported only for Part 1 offenses and does not include property losses suffered as a result of the commission of any Part 2 offenses such as fraud or embezzlement.

As was stated under "UCR Limitations," these values are affected by many variables and must be considered estimates at best. It is sometimes difficult to trace the recovery of some stolen property back to the offense or even the departmental jurisdiction in which the theft occurred. This coupled with the fact that the market value at the time of recovery is used instead of at the time of the theft should prompt cautious analysis of this data.

Arrests

Arrest information is collected for all Part 1 and Part 2 offenses according to the age, sex and race of the offender. It is not possible, however, to correlate race with sex or specific ages because the information is

collected independently, thus limiting analysis. Furthermore, arrest figures cannot be directly related to the number of crimes cleared because arrest totals count all the offenders who have been arrested even if several were involved in the commission of a singular offense. Therefore, arrest and clearance totals will be equal only by coincidence.

It should be kept in mind that arrest totals are not indicative of the number of different people involved in the commission of crime. A total of three arrests may represent the arrest of three different people or the arrest of the same person on three different occasions. Moreover, arrest totals also do not indicate the number of charges placed against an individual at the time of arrest.

Crime Factors

The amount and rate of crime for a particular community can sometimes be quite deceiving unless several factors are taken into consideration. Some of the factors which are known to affect the volume and type of crime occurring from place to place are:

- Population density and degree of urbanization with size of locality and its surrounding area.
- Variations in composition of the population, particularly youth concentration.
- Stability of population with respect to residents' mobility, commuting patterns, and transient factors.
- Modes of transportation and highway system.
- Economic conditions, including median income, poverty level, and job availability.
- Cultural factors and educational, recreational, and religious characteristics.
- Family conditions with respect to divorce and family cohesiveness.
- Climate.
- Effective strength of law enforcement agencies.
- Administrative and investigative emphases of law enforcement.
- Policies of other components of the criminal justice system (i.e., prosecutorial, judicial and correctional).
- Citizens' attitudes toward crime.
- Crime reporting practices of the citizenry.

The Uniform Crime Reports give a statewide view of crime based on statistics contributed by law enforcement agencies. Population size is the only correlate of crime

utilized in this publication. While the other factors listed above are of equal concern, no attempt is made to relate them to the data presented. The reader is, therefore, cautioned against comparing statistical data of individual reporting units from cities, counties, metropolitan areas, or colleges and universities solely on the basis of their population coverage or student enrollment.¹

¹ *Crime in the United States* - 1996, United States Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, p. iv.

Offense Definitions

Offenses in Uniform Crime Reporting are divided into two groupings, Part I and Part II. Information on the volume of Part I offenses known to law enforcement, those cleared by arrest or exceptional means, and the number of persons arrested is reported monthly. Only arrest data are reported for Part II offenses.⁵

Part I Offenses

Criminal Homicide:

- a. **Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter:**
The willful (nonnegligent) killing of one human being by another. Deaths caused by negligence, attempts to kill, assaults to kill, suicides, accidental deaths, and justifiable homicides are excluded. Justifiable homicides are limited to: (1) the killing of a felon by a law enforcement officer in the line of duty; and (2) the killing of a felon by a private citizen.
- b. **Manslaughter by negligence:**
The killing of another person through gross negligence. Traffic fatalities are excluded. While manslaughter by negligence is a Part I crime, it is not included in the Crime Index.

Forcible Rape:

The carnal knowledge of a female forcibly and against her will. Included are rapes by force and attempts or assaults to rape. Statutory offenses (no force used victim under age of consent) are excluded

Robbery:

The taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force or threat of force or violence and/or by putting the victim in fear.

Aggravated Assault:

The unlawful attack by one person upon another for the purpose of inflicting severe bodily injury usually accompanied by the use of a weapon or other means likely to produce death or serious bodily harm. Attempts are included since it is not necessary that an injury result when a gun, knife, or other weapon is used which could and probably would result in serious personal injury if the crime were successfully completed. Attacks using personal weapons (part of the attacker's body) must result in serious personal injury. Attacks using personal weapons (part of the attacker's body) must result in serious personal injury to be classified as aggravated assault. Simple assaults are excluded from this count.

Burglary:

The unlawful entry of a "structure" to commit a felony or theft. The use of force to gain entry is not required to classify the crime as burglary. Burglary is broken down into three subclassifications: forcible entry, unlawful entry where no force is used, and attempted forcible entry.

A "structure" is considered to include the following, but not limited to: dwelling houses, apartments, out buildings, public buildings, offices, factories, barns, cabins, etc.

Larceny:

The unlawful taking or stealing of property or articles without the use of force, violence, or fraud. This includes crimes such as shoplifting, purse snatching, pocket picking, thefts from motor vehicles, thefts of motor vehicle parts and accessories, bicycle theft, etc. This crime category does not include embezzlement, "con" games, forgery, and worthless checks. Motor vehicle theft is excluded from this category inasmuch as it is separate Part 1 offense.

Motor Vehicle Theft:

The unlawful taking or stealing of a motor vehicle, including attempts. This definition excludes taking for temporary use by those persons having lawful access to the vehicle.

UCR defines a motor vehicle as a self-propelled vehicle that runs on the ground and not on rails. Examples included automobiles, trucks, buses, motorcycles, mopeds, snowmobiles, etc. Thefts of farm and/or construction equipment, boats, and airplanes are not included in this category but are counted as larcenies.

Arson:

The willful or malicious burning of property with or without the intent to defraud. Includes attempts.

Part 2 Offenses**Other (Simple) Assaults:**

An unlawful attack or attempted attack upon another which does not result in serious injury to the victim and which does not involve the use of a dangerous weapon.

Forgery and Counterfeiting:

The making, altering, using or possession, with intent to defraud, of anything false which is made to appear true. Includes attempts.

Fraud:

Fraudulent conversion and obtaining money or property by false pretenses. Includes bad checks, confidence games, illegal conversion of services, etc., except forgeries and counterfeiting.

Embezzlement:

Misappropriation or misapplication of money or property entrusted to one's care, custody, or control. Includes larceny from employer.

Stolen Property:

The buying, receiving, and possessing of stolen property, or the attempt to do so.

Vandalism:

The willful or malicious destruction, injury, disfigurement or defacement of real or personal property without the consent of the owner or person having custody or control. Includes attempts.

Weapons:

All violations of regulations or statutes that control carrying, using, possessing, furnishing, and manufacturing deadly weapons or silencers. Includes attempts.

Prostitution and Commercialized Vice:

Sex offenses and attempted sex offenses of a commercialized nature. Includes prostitution, keeping houses of ill fame, pandering, detaining women for immoral purposes, etc.

All Other Sex Offenses:

All other offenses against common decency and morals. Includes statutory rape (without force) and all other sex offenses not previously defined.

Drug Laws:

The unlawful possession, sale, use, growth or manufacture of controlled substances. For UCR purposes these offenses are broken down into four subcategories: a. Opium or cocaine and their derivatives (morphine,

heroin, codeine), b. Marijuana, c. Synthetic narcotics — manufactured narcotics which can cause true drug addiction, d. Dangerous non-narcotic drugs.

Gambling:

Promoting, permitting or engaging in illegal gambling. Includes bookmaking, numbers and lottery, etc.

Offenses Against the Family or Children:

All charges of non-support and neglect or abuse of family or children. Note: Most child abuse, especially that resulting in injury, has been classified as either simple or aggravated assault.

Driving While Impaired:

Operating any motor vehicle or common carrier while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Liquor Laws:

Violation of state or local regulator laws. Includes sale to minors and drinking on a public conveyance. This category excludes Driving While Impaired and Drunk and Disorderly violations.

Disorderly Conduct:

Breaching the peace or attempting to do so. Includes violations of disturbing the peace, unlawful assembly, and drunk and disorderly.

Vagrancy:

Violation of state or local statutes pertaining to being a "suspicious character or person," vagrancy, etc.

All Other Offenses:

All violations of state or local regulatory laws except traffic offenses and offenses defined above or below. Includes kidnapping, extortion, trespass, etc.

Curfew and Loitering Laws:

Juvenile violations of local curfew and loitering ordinances.

Runaways - (Juveniles):

The unlawful truancy from a legal place of residence by a juvenile.